

DOCTOR. I wasn't! She was the pretty one, and she died. Why not me? I hadn't said my morning prayers either. And I was ugly. Not just plain. Ugly! I was fat,* I had big buck teeth, ears out to here, and freckles all over my face. Sister Mary Cletus used to call me Polka-Dot Livingstone. (*The DOCTOR is laughing in spite of herself.*)

MOTHER. So you left the Church because you had freckles?

DOCTOR. No, because . . . Yeah, I left the Church because I had freckles. And guess what?

MOTHER. What?

DOCTOR. (*smiling*) That's also why I hate nuns.

(*AGNES is heard singing, then humming until indicated.*)

AGNES. *Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus,
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.*

*Hosanna in excelsis.
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.*

DOCTOR. Why is that so important to you, her singing?

MOTHER. When I was a child I used to speak with my guardian angel. Oh, I don't ask you to believe that I heard loud, miraculous voices, but just as some children have invisible playmates, I had angelic conversations. Like Agnes' mother, you might say, but I was a lot younger then, and I am not Agnes' mother. Anyway, when I was six I stopped listening and my angel stopped

*or scrawny

Mother

speaking. But just as a sailor remembers the sea, I remembered that voice. I grew, fell in love, married and was widowed, joined the convent, and shortly after I was chosen Mother Superior, I looked at myself one day and saw nothing but a survivor of an unhappy marriage, a mother of two angry daughters, and a nun who was certain of nothing. Not even of Heaven, Doctor Livingstone. Not even of God. And then one evening, while walking in a field beside the convent wall, I heard a voice and looking up I saw one of our new postulants standing in her window, singing. It was Agnes, and she was beautiful; and all of my doubts about God and myself vanished in that one moment. I recognized the voice. (*silence*) Don't take it away from me again, Doctor Livingstone. Those years after six were very bleak.

DOCTOR. My sister died in a convent. And it's her voice I hear. (*AGNES stops singing. Silence.*) Does my smoking still bother you?

MOTHER. No, it only reminds me.

DOCTOR. Would you like one?

MOTHER. I would love one, but no thank you.

DOCTOR. Once, years ago at the beginning of "the scare," I decided to stop. I had no idea how many cigarettes I smoked then, but I used a book of matches a day. So I came up with the ingenious plan of cutting back on matches. First a half book, then a quarter of a book, then down to three or four a day. And look at what happened. I can't even eat without a cigarette in my hand. I can't go to weddings or funerals, plays, concerts. But some days I can go fourteen hours on a single match. Remarkable, isn't it? Do you think the saints would have smoked, had tobacco been popular?

MOTHER. Undoubtedly. Not the ascetics, of course, but, well, Saint Thomas More . . .